

# **MENTAL HEALTH**

## **A SILENT CRISIS**

**A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT  
ON MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES  
& ATTITUDES IN WEST WATERFORD**



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*The research in this document is drawn from published sources, from a survey of over 270 respondents across Co. Waterford, and from engagement with individuals availing of mental health services, with health professionals working in the sector, and with those who have been bereaved as a result of suicide.*

*We are grateful for everyone who assisted us in putting together this document. Our hope is that it provokes discussion and constructive debate about mental health services and attitudes in West Waterford, and how we, as a community, can work together to promote positive mental health.*



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**If anything in this report has affected you, or you feel the need to talk to someone please get in touch with one of the following helplines:**

<b>Samaritans</b>	<b>116 123</b>
<b>Pieta House 24/7</b>	<b>1800 247 247</b>
<b>Pieta House South East</b>	<b>051 85 85 10</b>
<b>Childline</b>	<b>1800 66 66 66</b>
<b>Teenline Ireland</b>	<b>1800 83 36 34</b>
<b>Aware</b>	<b>1800 80 48 48</b>

If you or someone you know is at risk of harm or in crisis please dial 999, visit your hospital emergency department, contact your GP, or call the Caredoc out of hours service on 1850 334 999.

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# Introduction

Positive mental health is a vital part of our overall health and wellbeing as humans. It impacts on how we function as individuals and how we interact with others throughout our lives.

Positive mental health is not only a personal goal, but should be a community objective as well. As we strive to build thriving communities in a healthy society, we need to pay attention to mental health as well as to physical health.

Unfortunately we are experiencing a silent crisis in communities across Ireland. This is also the case in West Waterford. Access to adequate and timely mental health services is not assured, and there are gaps in service provision. Our health service is under-resourced as a whole. This is despite the dedication, professionalism and best efforts of staff working within the public health system. Community and voluntary organisations do trojan work to fill the gaps in services and outreach, often times without any state support.

Children and young people in crisis are being forced to wait months or years to receive care, and adults experiencing mental ill-health are routinely failed by a system that is under-resourced, understaffed and not fit for purpose - despite the best efforts of dedicated staff.

Workers in our healthcare system are swamped, overworked and underpaid. There is a crisis in recruitment and retention and many key posts remain unfilled. The 'recruitment pause' means that when vacancies for positions such as Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurse arise, they remain unfilled.

Economic and social factors have an impact on mental health and wellbeing. Anxiety and stress as a result of the housing crisis, homelessness, financial pressure, debt, addiction, isolation, family law, and employment issues are



leading to mental ill-health or exacerbating existing conditions. Similarly, delays in accessing medical treatment, or a shortage of educational or social supports can have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. The full impact of the housing crisis and the austerity decade on parents and children may never be fully known.

There are few communities in the country that have not been devastated by suicide in recent years. Suicide and self-harm are on the increase. This crisis doesn't discriminate and men and women, old and young are impacted.

This document outlines the services available to people in West Waterford and identifies the gaps in service provision. It will discuss attitudes to mental health locally, and suggest proactive steps that can be taken locally to address shortcomings and strengthen our response to the crisis.

Our colleagues David Cullinane TD and Mark Ward TD have published costed policy proposals for addressing the failures in mental health services across the state, in their respective roles as Sinn Féin spokespersons on Health and on Mental Health. This document focuses on the local situation and what can be realistically delivered at local level to address the crisis. The local recommendations contained in this document should be read alongside Sinn Féin's state-wide proposals, which can be found online at [www.sinnfein.ie/policy-document-archive](http://www.sinnfein.ie/policy-document-archive)

We are determined to play our part in delivering change at local and national level, and will continue to work as both community members and public representatives to advocate for change and to do our best to fill the gaps in services caused by decades of underfunding and indifference.

**Donnchadh Mulcahy - Lismore LEA**

**Cllr. Conor D. McGuinness - Dungarvan LEA**

## Services

Waterford City and County has a total population of 127,363 according to the 2022 census, and West Waterford, comprising the Dungarvan-Lismore municipal district has a population of over 30,000. Waterford forms part of the HSE South East Community Health / CHO 5, which has a population of over half a million people.

Mental Health services in Waterford can be divided into statutory services provided by the HSE and services provided by community and voluntary organisations. In addition General Practice remains the first port of call for people concerned about mental health issues and there are several trained and accredited counsellors and psychotherapists operating private practices across Waterford City and County.

### Statutory Mental Health Services

Statutory mental health services in Waterford are provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE) as part of its Community Health Organisation 5 (CHO 5), which covers the South East region.

Statutory services are provided at ten sites across the City and County.

- Waterford Mental Health Services [UHW]
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) [UHW]
- The Suicide Resource Office [UHW]
- Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurses [Waterford and West Waterford]
- Psychiatry of Later Life [UHW]
- Ard na Déise Residence [Waterford]
- The Community Homes [Waterford]
- Brook House Community Mental Health Centre [Waterford]
- Springmount Residence [Dungarvan]
- Lismore Day Centre [Lismore]

There are only two statutory services with a mental health remit in West Waterford. In addition West Waterford shares a Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurse with South Kilkenny.

### **Community and Voluntary Mental Health Services/Supports**

There is a range of community and voluntary services and supports available in the Waterford City and County, some of which receive some state support. These services fall broadly into three categories:

1. Local organisations which are specific to the Waterford area.
2. National organisations that have an 'on-the-ground' presence in the area (both as independent organisations and as branches directly coordinated by national organisations).
3. National services that have online or telephone services that can be accessed by people in the Waterford area.

The list below provides an overview of organisations that fall into the first and second of these categories and map outlines their location. Only two of the services are based in West Waterford.

- AWARE (depression and bipolar disorder support) [Waterford]
- Bodywhys (support for people affected by eating disorders) [Waterford]
- GROW (Community mental health) [Waterford & Dungarvan]
- Laochas (youth mental health) [Waterford]
- Pieta House (suicide and self-harm prevention) [Waterford]
- Samaritans (listening service) [Waterford]
- Shine (empowerment and social change) [Waterford]
- Shona Project (positive mental health for girls) [Waterford]
- Waterford Mental Health Association [Waterford]

This list is not exhaustive; there are other relevant national organisations whose remit is more broadly conceived than mental health, and there may be other small locally based organisations and initiatives whose remit is relevant to mental health. There are also volunteers that operate individually to provide support and assistance.

Community and voluntary organisations strive to fill in the significant gaps in care and treatment provided by our statutory health service. They do much to promote positive mental health and also play a key role in preventing isolation and addressing social and economic pressures that can lead to anxiety and mental ill-health.

## Attitudes

An anonymised survey of 273 respondents from across West Waterford was conducted as part of the research for this document. Respondents were asked 11 questions and were provided with contact details for a range of mental health supports upon completion of the survey.

- Almost three-quarters (74%) of respondents report that they have a good or very good general awareness of knowledge relating to mental health.
- The vast majority (82%) of respondents think that mental health is a very important policy issue at local level, with a further 8% agreeing that it is a 'somewhat important' issue. This is despite mental health being a major talking point at national level when it comes to policy or public spending, and local authorities, as the primary driver of policy locally, currently having no official or statutory remit with regards to health or mental health.
- 91% of respondents believed that Waterford City and County Council should have a role in promoting positive mental health in the area it covers. Its clear there is an appetite for change in this regard.
- A large majority (63%) of people would speak with their GP in the first instance if they or someone close to them was experiencing an issue with their mental health. The next largest cohort would speak with a friend or family member in the first instance.
- 99% considered that there should be ongoing and age appropriate mental health education and training in the education system, while 11% of respondents felt that such programmes should only be made available in secondary schools.

- 91% of those who responded to the survey consider that there is not an adequate provision of public mental health services in Co. Waterford.
- 55% identified excessive wait time as a barrier to accessing services. A service not being available in the area was considered a barrier to access by 42% of respondents, while 32% pointed to prohibitive cost as another barrier. 30% of respondents identified a difficulty in finding information or making contact as a barrier. Other barriers to access were facilities not being physically accessible (7%), discrimination (5%) and language barrier (2%).
- Respondents were asked how they would rate the level of coordination between agencies or organisations if they or someone close to them have availed of mental health supports or services from more than one agency. Almost 35% of respondents reported a bad level of co-ordination while 28% rated the level of coordination as adequate or good.

## **Key Factors**

There is a multitude of items and issues that should be considered in any discussion on mental health. It is beyond the scope of this document to deal with these in detail, but it is important to acknowledge the following key factors.

### **Youth Mental Health**

Adolescence is the peak period of incidence for mental health problems. One in four Irish teenagers have experienced serious personal, emotional, behavioural or mental health problems. Almost one out of every ten teenagers in Ireland has deliberately self-harmed. Mental health issues are the main area of concern for young people in Ireland, and addressing these issues with early and appropriate treatment has a huge positive impact on the lives of young people and their families, and can guard against persistent mental health problems in later life. Child and Adolescent Mental health Services are in chronic disarray across the state. It is widely accepted that this services is at it's most dysfunctional in the South-East. Despite the trojan work several state-wide organisations and networks in the field of youth mental health Waterford does not yet have a permanent youth mental health support space.

### **Dual Diagnosis and Addiction**

Dual diagnosis is the term used when a person suffers from both a substance abuse problem and another mental health issue such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. In general mental health services and addiction treatments centres have not treated people holistically. In some cases mental health services exclude people with substance abuse problems and vice-versa. There is growing evidence to show that if both the addiction and the underlying psychological problem are treated, the prognosis for recovery is very good. Alcohol abuse remains an issue across Ireland and anecdotal evidence suggests that the use of addictive illegal and prescription drugs is on the increase locally. Mental Health services must recognise the importance of dual diagnosis in treatment and ensuring positive outcomes.

## **Mental Health in Later Life**

Getting older, retiring from work, or seeing children leave home often means a change in lifestyle and can present challenges. One in five older people living in the community, jumping to two in five people living in care homes, experience depression or poor mental health. Managing change, staying active, and maintaining social and community links are important factors. Isolation can lead to depression and loneliness. Financial worries as well as concerns about health or security can lead to stress, anxiety and depression. Our population is ageing and life expectancy is increasing. There is a need for greater attention to the mental health of older people, and this should inform strategy and allocation of resources.

## **Housing and Homelessness**

Ireland is in the grip of a housing and homelessness epidemic. There has been a growth in rough sleeping and street homelessness. Thousands of families are in emergency accommodation across the state and as of end March 2024 over 13,841 people are registered homeless in the 26 counties. This is the tip of the iceberg. Many more thousands of families are living in cramped, sub-standard or unsuitable/unsafe accommodation. Young couples are finding it all but impossible to set up a home and start a family due to an inability to secure a mortgage, the shortage of affordable housing for sale or rent, and a failure by the state to invest in public or cooperative housing.

## **Mental Health and Disability**

A survey of over 3,000 recipients of a disability allowance suggests that mental health is the issue that affects them most, ahead of mobility or physical issues. Other research shows that a person with an intellectual disability is two to three times more likely to develop a mental health problem than the general population. There are issues around access to services, not just in terms of physical access, transport or affordability; but also in terms of attitudes amongst service providers. It is not uncommon for people with disabilities that seek mental health supports to be directed or referred instead



to disability services. Ensuring people with disabilities are afforded the same access to appropriate mental health care and supports is vital.

## **Isolation**

The pandemic increased the prevalence of isolation in our communities and meant that this problem began to affect growing numbers of people of all ages. In the wake of the pandemic many people are still struggling to rebuild their social lives or find outlets to reconnect with their communities. There is need for greater supports for initiatives that combat isolation - from community development work, to social prescribing, and the maintenance of public services in rural and urban communities.

## **Financial Pressure and the Cost of Living**

It would be dangerous to dismiss the very real impact of financial pressures, poverty and debt on mental health. The cost of living is increasing exponentially. Families and individuals of all ages and backgrounds are struggling with financial pressures. One in five older people in Waterford is at risk of entering poverty, while younger families are struggling with out of control rents, and a fundamental change in the nature of work. Permanent jobs are becoming more scarce and job insecurity is a feature of the employment landscape in Ireland, including the gig economy and bogus self-employment. Pay and conditions have not kept up with the rate of economic growth, and many workers are subject to insecure hours in work.

# Conclusion

Its clear from the research outlined in this document that there are significant gaps in mental health services in West Waterford.

## Key findings

- Statutory mental health services are under-resourced and understaffed in Waterford.
- There is a lack of mental health service provision in West Waterford.
- There is a need to accessible spaces in the district, where people experiencing a mental health crisis can seek help and support.
- People in West Waterford have very little confidence in the ability of mental health services to adequately address the needs of the community.
- Of those that had availed of two or more mental health services almost half reported an inadequate level of coordination between services.
- Community and voluntary organisations with a focus on mental health work to fill gaps in service and to address specific needs in the area.
- The community and voluntary sector more broadly has a key preventative and health promotion role to play.
- People in West Waterford consider that they have good general awareness of mental health and most will attend their GP in the first instance if they have a concern about their mental health.
- Excessive wait times, prohibitive cost and lack of information are seen as key barriers to accessing supports and services.
- There is a strong belief in West Waterford that mental health should be an important policy issue at local level and that Waterford City and County Council should have a remit in promoting positive mental health.

## Recommendations

There is much that can be done at local level to promote positive mental health, to ameliorate the conditions that lead to anxiety, isolation, stress and mental ill-health, and to support community-based supports for those in crisis or recovery.

These recommendations are offered as a starting point for a much needed discussion on how we in West Waterford can use our resources, infrastructure and influence to affect positive change.

- **Provision of a dedicated drop-in mental health clinic in the Dungarvan Primary Care Centre with a satellite service in the future Lismore Centre.**
- **Development of a family resource centre for Dungarvan and West Waterford, alongside enhanced community facilities in the area.**
- **Funding for a Crisis Café in West Waterford, plus community funding for voluntary night-café initiatives across the area.**
- **A dedicated Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurse for West Waterford, and expansion of the Crisis Resolution Team model of multi-disciplinary teams providing rapid assessment and intensive support to people in mental health crisis.**
- **Employment of a full-time health and wellbeing officer by Waterford City and County Council as part of the Housing, Community and Emergency Services Directorate of Waterford City and County Council.**

- **Provision to be made in community funding schemes for 1. community-based mental health organisations, and 2. mental health initiatives by community and voluntary organisations with a broader remit i.e. residents associations, development committees, sports clubs etc.**
- **Provision of suicide awareness and prevention training for front line Council employees e.g. those dealing with the public on a regular basis as part of their everyday duties.**
- **Establishment of a Health and Wellbeing Linkage Group as part of the Public Participation Network for Waterford (PPN) to ensure the voice of community organisations are heard on this topic.**
- **Build on the positive work of Waterford Sports Partnership by increasing the emphasis on the positive mental health impacts of participation in sports and physical activity.**
- **Fund and coordinate an ongoing programme of accessible and age appropriate events in our libraries aimed at combatting isolation and promoting positive mental health.**
- **Take a proactive approach in making resources and infrastructure available to community and voluntary organisations, such as Men's and Women's Sheds; GIY groups etc.**
- **Publish an accessible annual directory of services and supports available across Waterford City and County.**

## Notes

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